

Bulgarian Muslims from the Chech region and their linguistic self-identification

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Abstract

The question of the language of Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks) is discussed by most authors in the context of minority rights or historical and cultural-ethnographic studies. Their conclusions and theses have served to justify assimilatory and brutal policies towards Muslims by the respective Greek or Bulgarian governments, the use of religion as an instrument of assimilation by the Turkish authorities, or development of an intermediate (autonomous) stage in Pomak identity for the purpose of subsequent assimilation. It is generally believed that in the Rhodopi Mountains there are various Bulgarian (South-Slavic) dialects that existed before the emergence of modern nation-states and their corresponding literary languages. The contemporary linguistic self-identification of the Chech population is directly related to social status. A large number of people with lower social status identify their native language as Pomak on the basis of its difference from Standard Bulgarian and Standard Turkish. This group is characterized by more conservative religious leanings, as a result of which they tend to distance themselves from Christians and mainly from Bulgarians. On the other hand, they identify themselves differently from the Turkish ethnic community despite the common religion. In this sense, they all (irrespective of social status) reject any Turkish connection in terms of language. Among people with high social status there is a small group that points out its non-Bulgarian identity; the members of this group are associated in some way with the Turkish or Muslim idea.

1. Geographical location of the Chech region

The region of Chech is in the westernmost Rhodopi Mountains, in south-eastern Pirin Macedonia. It is bordered on the east by the Rata River (Dospat Deré), on the north by the Kanina River, on the west by the

River Mesta (dialect: Myasta, Greek: Nestos), and on the south by the Mesta's sharp bend at the village of Vladikovo (now Vladikas in Greece). Chech incorporates the Bozdag mountain chain, known to the locals as "Liben." The region is dominated by highlands and humpbacked hills, which probably account for the name "Chech," from *çeç* or 'haystack' in Turkish (Ivanov 1996: 12).

Chech has two subregions, named after the eponymous towns of Drama (now in Greece) and Nevrokop (now Gotse Delchev in Bulgaria). The local population is mainly Bulgarian Muslim, with Christian Bulgarian and Turkish minorities. Towards the end of the Ottoman Empire, the region won specific self-government status known as the Republic of Tumrak (Bourchier 1992: 35) or the Republic of Gumuldjina (Greek Helsinki Monitor, The Pomaks 3). It was ruled by the *derebeys*, Hassan Aga and his son Ahmed Aga.

After the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, a large part of the Muslim population emigrated to present-day Turkey, and a smaller part to villages in Bulgaria on the border with Greece; a number of villages were burned down and deserted during the Balkan Wars and World War I. Today the only road linking the two parts of Chech is still under construction (2000) and, on the whole, local infrastructure is in a very bad condition.

Due to the Greek authorities' ban on research on the Slav-speaking population, this study covers mainly the population of Nevrokop Chech.

2. Theories about the language of the Pomaks: commentaries, analyses and national strategies

The question of the language of Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks) is discussed in the context of minority rights or historical and cultural-ethnographic studies (Konstantinov 1999; Poulton 1997; Raichevski 1998, etc.). Their conclusions have served to justify assimilatory and brutal policies towards Muslims by the respective Greek or Bulgarian governments, the use of religion as an instrument of assimilation by the Turkish authorities or development of an intermediate (autonomous) stage in Pomak identity for the purpose of subsequent assimilation. The purpose of the nationalist states is to achieve homogenization as a prerequisite for their internal stability and integrity.

In its report "The Pomaks" the Greek Helsinki Monitor presents different theories about the language and origin of this population without comment. The report notes in the opening paragraph that:

... Pomaks are those whose mother tongue is Pomakika/Pomakci (name in their language); most linguists call that language Pomak and, sometimes, Bulgarian. The Pomak language belongs to the linguistic family of the Southern Slavic languages, and, within them, to the linguistic group of Bulgaro-Macedonian. There is no information on Pomak dialects. Although there is no written tradition, the appropriate alphabet to write the language is the Cyrillic. It is generally believed that Pomak is one of the various Bulgaro-Macedonian dialects which existed in the Southern Balkans before the emergence of modern nation-states and their corresponding literary languages. (Greek Helsinki Monitor 1998)

This excerpt raises several questions.

2.1. What is the Pomak language?

If we proceed from the perspective of the population itself, the latter define this language by noting their difference from Christian Bulgarians by religion and by associating Standard Bulgarian with the common language of Christian Bulgarians only, whereas the formers' dialects differ significantly from Standard Bulgarian. In other words, the popular opinion has no scientific value, since it ignores the other dialects and fails to observe that the Pomak dialect is a natural extension and component of the Bulgarian dialect system at all levels of linguistic analysis (Mirchev 1936; Ivanov 1977; Klagstad 1958; Velcheva and Scatton 1995, etc.). It is another matter that there is no single language; there are several dialects which, in many cases, are very different from one another, especially considering, as the report notes, that there is no written tradition nor institutions that impose a universally valid norm.

The Greek authorities are now trying to rectify those "omissions" by pursuing their assimilatory goal in a gradual way. After the failure of earlier attempts at direct and brutal assimilation by imposing the theory of the Turkish origin and the theory of the Greek origin of Bulgarian Muslims, they have declared the existence of a Pomak ethnos with an unspecified ethnological (and even ethnographic, linguistic, etc.) identity. This ethnos will be easier to assimilate because of its volatility and assertion of maximum distinction from the Bulgarian (on a linguistic and cultural-ethnographic basis) and from the Turkish (on a religious-political basis). The Greek authorities have been particularly consistent in this attitude to the Bulgarian identity ever since they set foot on this territory, opening Turkish-language schools and publishing a Turkish-language newspaper (Greek Helsinki Monitor, *The Pomaks* 3; *Balkan Neighbors* 1998: 3). Last but not least, comes the publication of a Greek-Pomak

dictionary and a grammar of the Pomak language in 1996 (Balkan Neighbors 1998: 3; Raichevski 1998: 174), which is tantamount to an attempt at standardizing a language based on a dialect. Yet in this case, as in the publication, by the Greek authorities again, of the Abecedar primer (based on the Lerin dialect) in 1925 and of a Slav-Macedonian grammar and textbooks (based on the Lerin-Kostur dialect) in 1953: the appropriate alphabet is the Roman rather than the Cyrillic. In a display of ingenious nationalist imagination, a Pomak dictionary (containing 6,500 words) was compiled in 1995 at the suggestion of General Paraiodakis, Commander of the 4th Army Corps, using neither the Cyrillic nor the Roman, but a new, special alphabet (Raichevski 1998: 174). The Communist International — and its attempts in the recent past to create from the Bulgarian ethnos a Macedonian nation (by inventing an alphabet that is as distinct from the Bulgarian as possible), and the supposed Thracian, Dobroudja and Shoppe nations (not without the active cooperation of the Serbian authorities) have obviously served as a role model for the Greek authorities. In the invention of a new language today, priority is given to maximum distancing from the dialect that serves as a basis for the related standard language, to the variety of other related but dying dialects, and, in particular, to the non-scientific (purely political) character of such a language.

2.2. *Who are the Pomaks?*

Pomak is claimed to be one of the Bulgaro-Macedonian dialects that existed before the emergence of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of Macedonia. Associating a purely scientific question with a political act is, at best, improper, especially considering that the international borders are political and do not overlap with the ethnic borders. It is notable that the emergence of two distinct dialects (respectively, language) systems coincided with the emergence of a definite type of political system (not of a state, in Bulgaria's case) and pseudo-state (in Macedonia's case, within the former Yugoslavia). Besides, this occurred virtually overnight, that is, one language and one dialect system one day and two different languages and dialect systems the day after. It is obvious that this "glottotomy" was political rather than scientific. Language as a distinctive feature of ethnic identity is an important element in the latter's legitimacy before other peoples. That is why the artificial creation of a Macedonian ethnos and state required the corresponding invention of a Macedonian language (born in a politically comic way at the Monastery of St. Prohor Pchinski on 2 August 1944, see Macedonian Scientific Institute 1997).

In his “The Perception of Muslims in Greece and Bulgaria: between the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’” Ulf Brunnbauer (2001) examines the question of the Pomaks on a political-culturological plane, that is, on the plane of the alternating identification of this population by the respective government policy as “one of us” and as the “other.” The paper notes the new Greek position that Greek Pomaks differ from Bulgarian Pomaks by a number of physiological features, it suggests that this population be split between Greece and Bulgaria, as a result of which neither of the two countries would have any claims to it: an idea that is political in character, but lacks scientific and humane justification. In the same paper, the author cites the Greek thesis on the language of Pomaks as a mixture of Slav and Greek, since its vocabulary abounds in Greek words and idioms. Yet the Greek vocabulary cannot be claimed to be intrinsic to this “language” but is, rather, a result of contact between languages (respectively dialects) in the Southern Balkans (language is an open dynamic system which allows innovations to a certain extent) especially considering that there are about a dozen Greek words only in certain Rhodopi dialects (to say nothing of the dialect of Lovech Pomaks).

For Greek linguists, “Pomak” is a derivative of the Ancient Greek word Pomax, ‘drinker’, and the synonymous Ahryani is a derivative of the ancient Thracian tribe Agrianoi (Greek Helsinki Monitor, The Pomaks 2). The Pomaks are thus identified as both Thracians and Greeks, whereas the Thracians are a constituent element of the Bulgarian ethnos, along with the Slavs and Proto-Bulgarians, according to Bulgarian historians and linguists. However, it is true that the local population find the word “Pomak” offensive, but certainly not in the sense of ‘drinkers’. “Pomak” is not a self-designation, but a designation of this population used by Turks or Christian Bulgarians. Relations among the three communities are dominated by haughty negativism. Thus according to P. Vâlkov (Vâlkov and Kochev 2001), “Pomak” comes from the Turkish phrase *ahmak-pomak*, meaning ‘common’, ‘vulgar’ and ‘stupid’, whereas according to G. Ivanov (Ivanov 1963: 28), the term is of Slav origin: Serbian *помакнути, помаћу*, ‘to move’, ‘to retreat’, Polish *pomykać, pomknąć*, ‘to move away’. In other words, “Pomak” implies ‘apostate’, ‘renegade’, or ‘defector’. These connotations are also confirmed by the Turks’ designation of Pomaks as *erum-dinlii*, ‘half-faithful to Mohammed’ *dönme* or *gezur-dönme*, ‘betrayers of the faith’ (Shishkov 1914). The official Turkish and Bulgarian version is that “Pomak” comes from the verb *pomagam* ‘to help’, that is a ‘helper of the Turkish army’; other Bulgarian scholars (Vâlkov and Kochev 2001) associate it with *muka* ‘misery’, ‘torment’, *izmuchen* and *pomuchen* ‘tormented’.

At the same time, Turkish scholars claim that the Pomaks are descendants of Avars, Pechenegs, Cumans and, finally, of ancient Turks, who were linguistically Slavicized (as Greek scholars also claim, see Greek Helsinki Monitor, The Pomaks 1; Poulton 1997: 1). Those tribes could not have been Slavicized unless there was a Slav population which, if not a majority, at least equaled them in number (otherwise the existence of the Rhodopi dialects, to say nothing of their variety, cannot be attributed to state intervention). The question is: How could there have been such a population in regions populated by Pomaks only, especially considering that the Muslim elements in the spiritual and material culture of Bulgarian Muslims appeared very late and are influenced by the religion (which plays a very important part in the life of those people), and that there is no trace of any Pecheneg, Avar or Cuman features? The Slav identity in this sphere is obvious, and in some cases there are Christian and pagan elements. Thus for example, the Pomaks celebrate *Gergiden* (St. George's Day) on May 6 and *Serat Gergovichki* or God's Name, and their customs and rituals include "carrying of silent water" (village of Vaklinovo near Nevrokop) Pryadoy or Navik (villages of Vulkosel, Bogolin and Slashten, near Nevrokop), different superstitions and incantations, etc. (Shishkov 1965: 226–229, 179). The local toponyms include Christian names such as Svetekilé (St. Elijah) and Bogoroditsa (Holy Virgin; village of Touhovishte near Nevrokop) and a series of place names of Slav origin that greatly outnumber the Turkish ones; there are also ruins of necropolises, churches, monasteries and places of worship, etc.

Scholars associate the Pomaks with the Turks on the basis of the common religion, which is much more important to the former than the ethnographical heritage and language (on the local population's definition of their native dialect as Pomak and fears of their association with the Bulgarian language, i.e., Christians, see below). Precisely this factor has prompted the majority of Christian Bulgarians (as well as the goal of Turkey's assimilatory policy towards the Pomaks) to identify them as Turks or *Potournatsi* (*potourcheni*, i.e., Turkicized), which is identical with Turks, since the Muslim faith is associated with the oppressors (Turkish faith) (Raichevski 1998: 12). In this sense, it would be very interesting to see how those people would have been identified if the regions in question had been adjacent to or near Iraq, especially considering that Turkish scholars think that the name Ahryani comes from the Persian word *Ahiyan* or 'the known religious fraternities' (Greek Helsinki Monitor, The Pomaks 2). Or if they had bordered on Poland; during the Bulgarian National Revival, the Catholic newspaper Bulgaria advanced, for understandable reasons, the version that the Pomaks were descendants of Islamized Polyani, Polatsi, Polyatsi (Poles) who were abducted and enslaved

by the Turkish armies during their invasion of southern Polish territory around Kamenec-Podolsk (Rhodopi 1993: 6–7). As the above rather inconsistent theories show, the variations in the pseudo-scientific sphere that serves political goals are beyond the limits of serious, sound and in-depth research on a specific problem. The inconsistency of such claims leads to human tragedy on the scale of forced assimilation, burning down of villages and emigration.

This trend in Balkan policies on (religious and ethnic) minorities has not bypassed official Bulgarian policy either. The intolerant and suspicious attitudes to anything Turkish of certain Bulgarian fanatics in government prompted them to resort to enforced Christianization of Bulgarian Muslims (Greek Helsinki Monitor, *The Pomaks* 3) for the purpose of homogenizing Bulgarian society. In this case, Bulgarian Muslims were subjected to religious — not linguistic or ethnocultural assimilation — since there was no need of the latter. By contrast, in the case of Bulgarian Turks, Sofia launched a policy of large-scale expulsion to Turkey, and of all forms of assimilation of those who remained in Bulgaria. Many Pomaks also emigrated to Turkey whereas those who remained in Bulgaria only intensified their contempt for Christian Bulgarians (Greek Helsinki Monitor, *The Pomaks* 3). At the same time, there was a hardening of the position that the so-called Pomak language is distinct from the Bulgarian language, that is, that it is non-Bulgarian, which is the same as non-Christian, that is, Muslim. The subsequent waves of Christianization “proved” the truthfulness of this claim, and some people have gone as far as claiming that the native language of Muslim Bulgarians is Turkish.

If we ignore the political harm and disrespect for the religious and civil rights of Pomaks, the official Bulgarian scientific position on “the language” is the most objective one, considering the latter’s self-evident Bulgarian character. According to this position, even if a Pomak language were to be artificially created in Greece, it would be the third variant — a written regional form — of the Bulgarian language, along with those in the Republic of Macedonia and the region of Banat in Romania. Interestingly, the speakers of the Banat form have never denied that it is Bulgarian, even though this form has a written tradition and differs from Standard Bulgarian in some respects; just as they have never denied their Bulgarian identity, even though they are Catholics (Greek Helsinki Monitor, *The Pomaks* 2). It is obvious that religious identity cannot be taken seriously as an argument for the identification of a separate language, especially considering that Bulgaria’s population is not made up of Orthodox Christians only but also of a significant number of Protestants and other religious minorities. Clearly, the reciprocal negation (of Orthodox and Muslim Bulgarians) has caused the emancipation of the

Muslim community, which emancipation should also take a linguistic form. Conversely, the recognition of the Bulgarian identity of such a “language” greatly upsets authors who want to reassert the status quo in relations between Orthodox Christians and Muslims. According to Bulgarian scholars, the Pomaks are descendants of Islamized (by force or voluntarily) crypto-Christian Bulgarians (The Pomaks 2; Shishkov 1965: 176–177), whereas the other name of the Pomaks, *Ahryani* comes from ‘infidels’ (Greek Helsinki Monitor, The Pomaks 2) or from the Arabic *ahir*, ‘the last (to be converted to Islam)’, plus the Persian suffix for plurality *-yan* (Raichevski 1998: 192).

The conclusion that may be drawn from the above-mentioned theories and government strategies is that a distinction should be made between assimilatory policies towards ethnic minorities pursued by nationalist governments (for the purpose of building a homogeneous and, hence, stable state), and the ethnographic and folkloric reality in regard to ethnic minorities (Lashkova 1996). Nationalist policies precede or follow pseudo-scientific studies that serve the former (the so-called *Megali* idea, Garashanin’s plan for a Great Serbia, restoration of the Ottoman Empire, a Great Albania, a Great Bulgaria, etc.). Unlike the past, when they were direct and violent, today’s methods of assimilating a particular community are gradual and indirect, pursuing short-term or long-term objectives. In this sense, the Turkish authorities have been pursuing the shrewdest policy towards the Pomaks; while advocating their civil and religious rights, Ankara has been trying to impose Turkish-language teaching on Bulgarian Muslim pupils as compulsory, since Turkish is supposed to be their native language. This five-century-long Turkish domination in the Balkans and influence through Islamic religion, institutions and political parties bred suspicion and insecurity among the Greek and Bulgarian authorities. A natural settlement of this issue ought to be sought within the European Union.

3. Bulgarian Muslims from Chech and their reception of their native language

In Chech, as elsewhere, language is one of the distinctive markers of ethnic and geographical identity. Through language, people identify themselves and the nationality or ethnic identity of their interlocutors, which part of the country and, which population center the latter come from, etc. At the level of speech, the attitude of the speakers of the respective language or dialect to others, as well as to the standard norm, is important.

The linguistic self-identification of the Chech population is directly related to social status. A large number of people with lower social status identify their native language as Pomak on the basis of its difference from Standard Bulgarian and Turkish. This group is characterized by more conservative religious leanings, as a result of which they tend to distance themselves from Christians and mainly from Bulgarians. On the other hand, they identify themselves as different from the Turkish ethnic community (villages of Dubnitsa, Hvostyané/Foustané and Blatska), despite the common religion. In this sense, they all (irrespective of social status) reject any Turkish connection in terms of language. Conversely, part of this group defines their language as corrupted Bulgarian (a term for dialects used in Bulgarian linguistics in the past). In other words, they assume that there might be a relation to the Bulgarian language, tending to have in mind the standard norm. Others — mainly middle-aged people who define their views as unconventional — say that they originally spoke Turkish but that the Bulgarian language was imposed after the Bulgarians came to this territory. In proof, they cite the fact that their grandparents spoke Turkish, without mentioning that they spoke a Bulgarian dialect. As known, Muslims studied Turkish en masse within the Ottoman Empire; later, in the Kingdom of Bulgaria, they also studied Turkish at school. People from this subgroup regard any Bulgarian identification as identical with Christian — which is absolutely inadmissible considering their religious conservatism. The need of finding a worthy specific identity prompts variation in regard to native language. A compromise is offered by the hypothesis that “our mother is Bulgarian, Christian, and our father is Turkish: our language comes from our mother and our faith from our father” (village of Ablanitsa).

The quest for individual identity transcends the boundaries of the Balkans and finds justification in Kazakhstan. Examples are cited from the kinship terms and some elements of the population’s culture and character (village of Godyashevo). As is known, the kinship terms in many Muslim countries and in China are if not identical, then at least similar (e.g., according to L. Ilieva, the word *nyan/nyané* ‘mother’ is used with the same sound form in Chinese, and has the same root as *mama* from Indo-European root **m/n*; in child language, one might find the origin of some other kinship terms). This Kazakh hypothesis attempts to go beyond the Bulgarian and Turkish context. The hypothesis is upheld by the middle-aged people and corresponds to the theory of some Bulgarian scholars that the Proto-Bulgarians came from Central Asia (the place name “Chech” and its association with Chechens, who are claimed to have been a Proto-Bulgarian tribe or related to the Proto-Bulgarians). The adjective “Pomak” itself has very pejorative connotations for the

locals when used by outsiders. The local population uses it only at the local level or when talking to friends or family, irrespective of religious, ethnic or other identity.

Another category of people comprises those with secondary or primary education who have traveled abroad. Learning first-hand about lifestyle and mores in the respective foreign country, they compare them with those in their own community. Thus during World War II, men who served in the Bulgarian Army were stationed in Vardar Macedonia: more specifically, in the area of Skopje. This accounts for the opinion that the dialect of the village of Vulkosel is “something Macedonian,” which is based on the auxiliary verb *сѹм* ‘to be’, the $h > f$ and $\text{ə} > o$ shift, etc. This group of people constitute an intermediate community between the first group analyzed above, who approach their language as autonomous (without any relation to other languages), and the second group, whose members have a broader view. The latter have higher social status — intellectuals, business persons, university students, etc. — characterized by absence of variation in regard to their own linguistic and ethnic identification. They say that their language is a Bulgarian dialect (that just as they have a dialect of their own, so does every religion or population center in Bulgaria) and that they are Bulgarians whose religion is Islam, which they adopted later. This view corresponds to the official Bulgarian scientific version about the origin of the population from this area, which is also taught at school. Apart from this manipulative approach in the school curriculum, people in this category cite as proof of their origin and linguistic identity toponyms related to Christianity or typical Bulgarian place-names, archaeological finds from the Roman and Christian age, anthropological features similar to those of the Russians: a marker of high Slav “purity” (blond hair, blue eyes and very pale skin) for the villages of Godyashevo and Touhovishte. The dialect of these two villages is said by the residents of the other villages to “be a bit like Russian, with *uy*, and very soft,” that is, palatalized. This definition is upheld by all members of the different groups; but it is more popular in the group with lower social status and the intermediate group, as a result of penetration by the group with higher social status (people who are familiar with Russian or have studied history of the Bulgarian language and dialects). The thesis that the influence among the separate groups is a one-way process — from those with higher to those with lower social status — is also confirmed by the large number of university students from this area; good schooling and education in principle are held in high esteem, and so are people who have won a reputation as good professionals and highly cultured people.

Among the people with high social status, there is a small group that point out their non-Bulgarian identity. The members of this group are associated in some way with the Turkish or Muslim idea, having graduated in Turkey, they are *hodjas* or administrators affiliated to a particular political party that protects the Muslim community. They also identify Bulgarians with Christians. Self-identification as Bulgarians is entirely inadmissible for them, because they are afraid that if they allowed even the slightest Bulgarian identification, they would be condemned as quasi-Muslims and identified with Christian Bulgarians, which compels them to be religiously conservative and even to adopt elements of extreme streams in Islam. They strive towards maximum distinction from anything Bulgarian. In this context, they say that their mother tongue is Turkish (Greek Helsinki Monitor, *The Pomaks* 3–4). This group is also characterized by absence of variation in regard to their origin and native language; however, they rule out any association of their self-identification with certain Christian, pre-Christian and Bulgarian elements in the culture (in the broad sense of the word) of the Chech population. If they allow any commentary at all, this is excessive cultural and historical idealization and quest for an ancient Turkish people that forgot its native language (Arif Mustakli, see Rhodopi 1993 in connection with the census in the Pirin area and report of a parliamentary commission of inquiry). In their case, maximum distinction from the Bulgarian ethnos requires maximum proof of their Muslim (identical with Turkish) identity and loyalty at the cost of legend creation and mystification, and even self-proclamation as purer Turks and truer believers than other Muslims. For members of this group, linguistic identity is determined by the extra-linguistic factor.

We can thus distinguish two groups of people depending on the type of linguistic (and ethnic) self-identification: (1) a variant type with lower social status, educational attainment; (2) a nonvariant type with higher social status, educational attainment, guided by a leading factor that is: (a) complex; (b) extralinguistic.

The conclusion suggested by the above-mentioned phenomena, observed first-hand, is that the variety of opinions has a historical explanation and depends, to some extent, on the contemporary processes of democratization and civil society building in the Balkans. It also depends on the educational policy in Bulgaria (nor in Bulgaria alone, but also in the other Balkan countries). In addition, it results from the nonscientific (popular) and rash perception of the differences (not of the similarities) of the dialect from Standard Bulgarian, without taking into account the fact that the same distinctive features are also typical of other dialects, and that other dialects also depart from the norm to one extent or

another. The emancipation of the native language ensues from the non-mixed character of Chech (with the exception of two or three Turkish-speaking villages), whose population is Bulgarian Muslim only. Hence the variation in opinions is due to many complex reasons.

Disregard for and substitution of the ethnolinguistic and ethnographic identity of the population is, in essence, tantamount to assimilation and runs counter to the European Union's principled position on the preservation of the linguistic and ethnographic wealth of ethnic communities. Some authors are obviously trying to impose the American approach to nation-building, without due consideration for linguistic and ethnographic traditions that have developed over several centuries. Yet the ethnography, the spiritual and material culture, and the dialects of Bulgarian Muslims are a natural element of the all-Bulgarian patchwork of dialects, traditional costumes, physical (ethnographic) objects and other features that are typical of all Bulgarians — be they Muslims, Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Protestants or other religious groups (Veleva et al. 1988; Stojkov 1993).

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